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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANTANANARIVO 000097

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SUBJECT: NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE TO BEGIN SATURDAY?

REF: A. ANTAN 89

[1](#)B. ANTAN 2/11 1700 EMAIL SITREP

Classified By: Ambassador Niels Marquardt for Reasons 1.4 B and D.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The National Consultative Conference (NCC) described in ref A could begin here this Saturday, February 14. Post is supporting this effort with funding and suggestions on participation, as well as supportive public diplomacy. We are preparing a press statement welcoming this breakthrough. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) A/UNSYG Haile Menkerios and FFKM Church Council President Odon both explicitly identified a broadened circle of dialogue as a major objective in the February 10 opening ceremony for negotiations between teams representing the President and the opposition. Those teams were chaired respectively by National Assembly President Jacques Sylla and Tana Deputy Mayor Nirhy Lantu Andriamahazo. Both Sylla and Andriamahazo diplomatically resisted the suggestion of broadening the dialogue in their own opening statements: Sylla said it would "slow things down to add to many others", while Andriamahazo argued that his team already represents over 60 different Malagasy political parties. Both the UN and FFKM rebuffed this resistance, and Menkerios told the Ambassador late on Wednesday, after a full day of discussions, that he intended to continue to push forward toward a NCC (or Round-Table). The Ambassador agreed with his approach as the best way to create a truly durable, Malagasy-driven solution to the current crisis, as well as the national reconciliation that never took place after the 2001-2002 crisis. (Menkerios also said he intends to depart on Thursday to attend ceremonies in Harare.)

[1](#)3. (C) On Thursday morning the local UN System Coordinator phoned the Ambassador to say that the FFKM was preparing to launch the NCC on Saturday, apparently now with support from all parties. While the UN has adequate funding of its own for this conference, he said he was seeking "symbolic funding support" from all the major donors, in order to project the image of a broadly-supported initiative. The Ambassador agreed to provide modest funding and associate the USG with the effort, provided suggested names on participation (especially from the private sector, which might otherwise have been excluded), and agreed to support the effort with further public statements, as needed and as soon as appropriate. For now, the launch has not/not been made public so any supportive statements would be premature. Meanwhile, the FFKM-facilitated negotiations between the two sides are continuing today.

[1](#)4. (C) Post will provide AF/E with a suggested text for a press statement for release in Washington in support of this breakthrough, once public.

MARQUARDT